**Syllabus: Saint Vincent de Paul**

**1. Early connection of the Society with the Congregation of the Mission**:

St. Vincent, a Parisian saint; Society: founded in Paris; founding members met in Clichy; met in CM motherhouse chapel in Paris in presence of SV’s remains.

**2. Understanding the saint’s life:**

Vincent I: more interesting stories, his rural upbringing, beginnings; characteristic: “opportunist,” taking advantages of the providential opportunities that presented themselves.

Vincent II: more productive and mature life and ministry; characteristic: manager of a vast series of undertakings known for being “apostle of charity,” financially aware. Also gave missions among the rural poor. Centrality of Jesus, “Lord of Charity.” “To do what Jesus did.”

Another division:

Pre-founding of CM: Parish missions, Confraternity of Charity, chaplain general of galleys, family chaplain of the Gondi family. Ending with founding of CM.

Post-founding of CM: Seminaries, foreign works, Daughters of Charity, Ladies of Charity of Paris, Sisters of the Visitation; royal council, help for clergy, lay retreats, poor relief, emergency relief.

**3. His character:**

Consider his eyes: in art, signifying awareness; “Just the facts, ma’am;” “Be aware of your surroundings.”

Thinker/Contemplative: meditated on the presence of God. More practical than theoretical:

What am I seeing? Examples in his talks: donkeys at the tavern; children and butterflies.

Personal relationships: the women in his life, charming, good fund raiser; approachable, open to discussion with leaders of society (queen, prime minister, cardinals and bishops), and with country folks: “How are your horses?” Open to Protestants, Jews, Muslims.

Management: consultation, lay advisors; meetings: careful and deliberate (slow), considering all the pros and cons before deciding.

**4. His death and influence:**

Acknowledgements of his positive influence, completion of unfinished projects, calls for his canonization, continuation of his works, imitation of his outreach toward the poor, “our masters.”

**Texts for reading and reflection**

**Source: Common Rules of the Congregation of the Mission,**

**published by St. Vincent de Paul, 1658**

Preface: And, as you can see, I have tried to base all the Rules, where possible, on the spirit and actions of Jesus Christ. My idea was that men who are called to continue Christ’s mission, which is mainly preaching the good news to the poor, should see things from His point of view and want what He wanted. They should have the same spirit that He had and follow in His footsteps.

Chap. I, 1: We read in Sacred Scripture that Our Lord Jesus Christ, sent on earth for the salvation of the human race, did not begin by teaching; He began by doing. And what He did was to integrate fully into His life every type of virtue. He then went on to teach, by preaching the good news of salvation to poor people, and by passing on to His Apostles and disciples what they needed to know to become guides for others. Now, the little Congregation of the Mission wants, with God’s grace, to imitate Christ the Lord, in so far as that is possible in view of its limitations. It seeks to imitate His virtues as well as what He did for the salvation of others. It is only right that if the Congregation is to do the same sort of work, it should act in the same sort of way. This means that the whole purpose of the Congregation is: (1) to have a genuine commitment to grow in holiness, patterning ourselves, as far as possible, on the virtues which the great Master Himself graciously taught us in what He said and did; (2) to preach the good news of salvation to poor people, especially in rural areas; (3) to help seminarians and priests to grow in knowledge and virtue, so that they can be effective in their ministry.

Chap. II, 2: Christ said: *Seek first the kingdom of God and his justice, and all these things which you need will be given to you as well.* That is the basis for each of us having the following set of priorities: matters involving our relationship with God are more important than temporal affairs; spiritual health is more important than physical; God’s glory is more important than human approval. Each one should, moreover, be determined to prefer, like Saint Paul, to do without necessities, to be slandered or tortured, or even killed, rather than lose Christ’s love. In practice, then, we should not worry too much about temporal affairs. We ought to have confidence in God that He will look after us since we know for certain that as long as we are grounded in that sort of love and trust we will be always under the protection of God in heaven, we will remain unaffected by evil and never lack what we need, even when everything we possess seems headed for disaster.

Chap. II, 4: Jesus the Lord expects us to have the simplicity of a dove. This means giving a straightforward opinion about things in the way we honestly see them, without needless reservations. It also means doing things without double-dealing or manipulation, our attention being focused solely on God. Each of us, then, should take care to behave always in this spirit of simplicity, remembering that God likes to deal with the simple, and that He conceals the secrets of heaven from the wise and prudent of this world and reveals them to little ones.

Chap. II, 14: We should follow, as far as possible, all the Gospel teaching already mentioned, since it is so holy and very practical. But some of it, in fact, has more application to us, particularly when it emphasizes simplicity, humility, gentleness, mortification and zeal for souls. The Congregation should pay special attention to developing and living up to these five virtues so that they may be, as it were, the faculties of the soul of the whole Congregation, and that everything each one of us does may always be inspired by them.

Chap. III, 7: No one should go in for useless or exotic things. Each one, too, should keep his needs within moderate limits, and curb his hankering after such things, so that his life style as regards food, room, and bedding is that of a poor person. And in this connection, and with regard to everything else for that matter, he should be prepared to put up with even the worst facilities in the house, willing to feel the bite of poverty in his life.

Chap. VI, 1: One of the principal things Christ did was to visit and care for the sick, and especially persons who were poor. He very often recommended this to those He was sending into His vineyard. For this reason the Congregation should have a special care for helping and visiting the sick, whether outside or inside the house. We should help them physically and spiritually, as far as is practical, especially on missions. As well as this we should pay particular attention to setting up and visiting the Confraternity of Charity.

Chap. XII, 5. As simplicity is the principal and most characteristic virtue of Missioners, we should show it at all times and in all circumstances. We should be more careful to practice it during missions, especially when we proclaim the Word of God to country people, to whom, because they are simple, God speaks through us. For this reason our style of preaching and catechizing should be simple and suited to the people, and in line with the simple method the Congregation has used up to now. Each one, therefore, is to avoid completely speaking with too much tenderness or with affection. We should take care not to preach any far-fetched or too subtly contrived ideas, or pointless distinctions, from the pulpit of truth. We should remember that Christ the Lord and His disciples made use of a simple way of speaking and, because of this, reaped a much better harvest with a most abundant yield.

Chap. XII, 12. We must remember, above all, that although we are always to be guided by those virtues which make up the spirit of the mission, we should be armed with them to the fullest possible extent when the time comes for us to minister to the country people. At that time we should look on them as the five smooth stones with which, even at the first assault, we will defeat the Goliath from hell in the name of the Lord of Armies and will bring the Philistines, that is, sinners, under God’s rule. But this will happen only if we first lay aside Saul’s armor and make use of David’s sling. In other words, we must go out preaching the Gospel like Saint Paul, not with a show of oratory or philosophy, but grounded in doctrine, and in the power of the Spirit, even if eloquence is lacking. We should remember that since, as the same Apostle says, God chose those who, by human standards, are weak, foolish, and contemptible in order to rout and destroy those who, by the same standards, are learned and powerful, we can hope that in His boundless goodness He will give us the grace to cooperate in our own way in His work of saving people, especially poor persons in country areas, even though we are the least deserving of workers.